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ABSTRACT

A construction occurring in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is examined: NPi "call" NPi V"-ing", as in "the woman call herself working." First, a number of reasons that such a form might be overlooked or dismissed as an AAVE dialect form are outlined. Then the sociolinguistic method is applied to the construction to analyze its syntactic context and distribution, semantic-pragmatic function, and status as a form AAVE. It is concluded that the construction is a camouflaged form somewhat different from classic cases of camouflaging, and that its syntactic similarity disguises its semantic uniqueness. Lack of stigmatization is also seen as contributing to the camouflaging. A 23-item bibliography and the questionnaire used to elicit information on the construction's use are appended. (MSE)

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On the Sociolinguistic Significance of Obscure Dialect Structures: The NP_i *call* NP_i *Ving* Construction in African American Vernacular English

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Since the classic descriptions of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) set forth the major structures of the variety several decades ago now (Labov, et al 1968; Labov 1972; Wolfram 1969; Wolfram and Fasold 1974), a number of new structures have been added to the catalogue of features and a number of structures mentioned only in passing have now received more focused descriptive attention. In the process, there has been considerable speculation as to why these structures were not given adequate attention in the initial flurry of descriptive activity. The possible explanations for exclusion may seem like a trivial sociolinguistic matter, but they actually touch on fundamental questions about the nature and direction of language change, sociolinguistic marking, and methodology in the collection and analysis of language data.

In this article, I consider a structure that has not, to my knowledge, been discussed in the previous literature on AAVE, namely, the particularized use of the NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** construction illustrated in sentences such as those in (1).

(1) a. They call theyselves/themselves dancing.
b. I call myself dancing.
c. Ø call themselves dancing.

Although most varieties of English use ***call*** with nominal and adjectival phrases (*He calls himself a man, She calls herself smart*), its use with V***ing*** constructions is much rarer, if used at all. The construction is typically uttered with statement intonation, and may have emphatic stress on ***call*** in its most common counterfactual reading. In this reading the construction means that what may appear to be the case is not, in fact, the actual case. There is, however, at least one particularized conversation context in which the emphatic stress may only be placed on the V***ing*** complement of ***call***. Furthermore, there is an embedded syntactic context in which the ***call*** may not be stressed. Thus, it does not appear that stress is a necessary part of its specialized pragmatic function to be discussed in this account.

The most frequent form of this construction involves a subject pronoun, or even an elliptical subject as in (1c), suggesting that this expression typically occurs heavily contextualized within a conversational exchange. As we shall see, the structure has a number of the common attributes of idioms, although its 'degree of idiomaticity' is not nearly as great as the classically defined idiom in which the lexical items of a phrase cannot be decomposed semantically. Although the construction most typically occurs with a subject pronoun as in (1), it may also occur with NPs as in (2).

(2) a. That man call(s) himself fixing my car.
b. The woman called herself working.

There are a number of dimensions of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** that need to be discussed, including its syntactic distribution, its semantic-pragmatic function, and its status as a form of AAVE. Before considering these dimensions of the construction, however, it is instructive to consider the reasons why a form such as this might be easily overlooked or dismissed as an AAVE dialect form.

Explaining Neglected Structures

There are a number of reasons why particular structures of AAVE might not have been considered in the initial cataloguing of features that took place a quarter of a century ago now. One obvious explanation appeals to linguistic innovation, maintaining that the current version of AAVE has introduced or restructured items in ways not found in earlier versions of the variety. The extent to which such innovations are surfacing in AAVE is, of course, the issue at the heart of the so-called "divergence controversy" that has gripped the study of AAVE since the mid-1980s (e.g. *American Speech* Vol. 3 1987; Butters 1989; Bailey and Maynor 1987; Wolfram 1990; Rickford 1992). From this perspective, contemporary AAVE may indicate linguistic changes not yet initiated during the 1960s when the first stage of descriptive surveys was undertaken. This is, of course, the explanation Labov offered for the specialized use of present tense *-s* marking in narrative structures as a part of his argument for the divergence hypothesis (cf. Labov 1987; Myhill and Harris 1986).

A second reason why structures might not have been included focuses on the data collection techniques traditionally used in sociolinguistic fieldwork methodology. It has been pointed out by Labov (1987) and Myhill and Harris (1986) that the single-subject interview with a professional stranger (Agar 1980) or even with a socially-situated community member, the staple of sociolinguistic data collection, does not provide a context for the use of certain kinds of structures. In particular, structures used in performed narratives or in particular kinds of interactional routines may not be accessible within the format of the traditional sociolinguistic interview (Wolfson 1976). In tandem with the explanation of linguistic innovation cited above, this was one of the explanations for the fact that narrative present uses in AAVE had not been observed in earlier descriptive accounts (Myhill and Harris 1986).

A third reason for descriptive exclusion is the relative infrequency of forms. Regardless of the sociolinguistic context, some structures are quite rare, thereby limiting the likelihood of occurrence in the everyday speech pool of data available for observation and analysis. A candidate for this explanation is the 'resultative ***be done***' construction quoted in Baugh (1983) and described in more detail in Labov (1987).

A fourth reason is the lexical or idiomatic character of certain forms. Initial descriptive emphasis rightly focused more attention on the general morphosyntactic and phonological patterns of AAVE than idiosyncratic, lexically-based differences. Lexically-restricted phenomena are usually subject to the hit-or-miss fancy of a

particular analyst, indicating a kind of describer's bias typically relating to the obtrusiveness of a particular item to the analyst. For example, the semantic extension of the verb ***say*** to include onomatopoeic noises as in *The rock say boom* (Labov, et al 1968) or the use of ***go*** as a static locative, as in *There go the pencil*, might catch the fancy of some analysts while the semantic extension of ***hold*** to include the semantic domain of 'borrow' (e.g. *Can I hold your pencil*) or the regionally-restricted conversion of the adjective ***rude*** to a verb (e.g. *He ruded him in line* 'He stepped in front of him inappropriately in line') may not be noticed (cf. Wolfram forthcoming).

Finally, there are so-called camouflaged forms, that is, forms that have been obscured because they appear so much like similar syntactic constructions or lexical items of other varieties, particularly the normative varieties of English that have served as a reference point for describing what is different about AAVE. Classic examples of camouflaging are Spears' (1982) account of 'indignant ***come*** V***ing***' constructions such as *He come talking that trash again*, which looks structurally quite similar to the movement verb **come** + V***ing*** complements, and Baugh's (1984) description of 'progressive aspect ***steady*** in *They steady working*, which appears quite similar to the adverbial uses of ***steadily*** in standard varieties of English. In these cases, it is maintained that important semantic-pragmatic distinctions reflective of a more basilectal or mesolectal variety have been obscured by a surface affinity with similar constructions in the acrolectal variety.

It is important to note that these various explanations are not mutually exclusive. For example, a form may be relatively rare, camouflaged, and occur only in specialized sociolinguistic settings all at the same time. As we shall see, the construction NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** is such a form that fits into this category.

Sociolinguistic Method and NP_i *call* NP_i V*ing*

In single subject interviews, sentences such as (1) and (2) are admittedly rare, since they often occur in a specialized type of verbal repartee between community members. The typical communication event for the NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** construction is an evaluative one between community participants, as a speaker offers a comment about behavior to a conversational participant who shares the speaker's evaluative orientation. Thus, a speaker might utter a comment such as (1a) in the course of a conversation about a person's dancing ability to someone who shares a particular group perspective on 'good dancing'. Sentence (1a) was uttered by a lifetime African American resident of Washington, D.C. in response to some people at a dance who were doing an out-of-date dance step. However, this phrase is not limited to third person subjects; a speaker may make this comment about his or her own behavior, as in (3), which was uttered by an African American male in his mid-twenties in Washington, D.C. in response to a friend who interrupted him while he was attempting to get some rest with the question, "What are you doing?"

(3) I call myself trying to get some sleep.

Given the particularized communication contexts for this form and its relative rarity as a lexically-restricted item, it is not surprising that it does not occur often in the standard single-subject sociolinguistic interview with a professional stranger, or even with a socially-situated community member conducting an interview. Most of the examples cited here come from everyday interaction with community members over the course of several years' observation, supplemented by examples collected by colleagues and students at the University of the District of Columbia.[1] In addition to the data collected through everyday observation, a structural elicitation task using various scenarios provided additional data on this form (cf. appendix for a copy of the questionnaire).

Although the ***call*** construction is admittedly rare, there is reason to suggest that it is well-represented in the African American community, at least the African American community in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland.[2] And because of some of the camouflaged dimensions we shall discuss eventually, its use is more dispersed across the basilect-acrolect continuum of African American speakers than many more overtly diagnostic forms. Most African American subjects interviewed about the form report that they have at least heard the construction. Furthermore, some of its uses apparently have been around awhile. Certainly, there is evidence for its existence in the 1960s, when the first descriptive avalanche of AAVE studies was undertaken. For example, consider the following example in (4), taken from the original Detroit Dialect Study (Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1967). The example comes from an interview with a 47-year-old African American male who migrated from Mississippi to Detroit when in his mid-30s.

(4) Well, I see 'em sittin' down on the floo', out there in the yard, they's countin' one another's toes. Now what they be doin' that fo' I don't know... They be doin' that kind of game, and when they get through, somebody got to do some runnin'. I don't know what it('d) be, what ***they be calls theyself doin'***. (Detroit Dialect Study, Subject 506) Dialect Study 1965)

A more recent speech sample (5), recorded on November 24, 1992, shows that the construction is still in use. The example comes from a 61-year-old African-American male, who was born in South Carolina and has lived in D.C. since age 13.

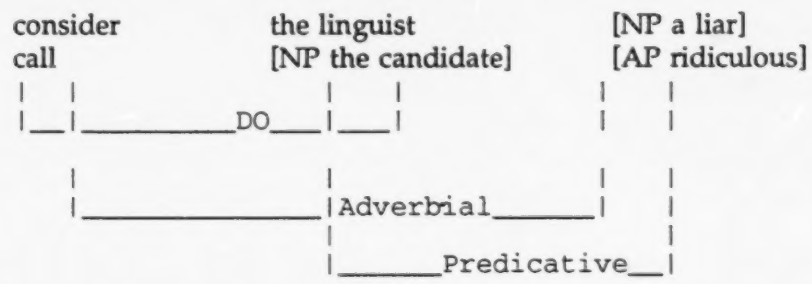
(5) The pots and pans was supposed to be a little better than the bus job anyway. . . . So he call himself, I guess, really putting me back, cause, see, if you working pots and pans, you in that kitchen where all the heat and the sweat, . . . I mean, the water, steam, and stuff, you really . . . that's a messy job, they call it.

On one level, it is tempting simply to dismiss this construction as a relatively superficial and trivial lexically-based difference between AAVE and other varieties of English, if it is even that. On another level, however, the examination of such a form may reveal essential insight into a subtle means of dialect differentiation and language change, and the sociolinguistic explanation of such change along the acrolectal-basilectal continuum.

The Syntactic Context of NP_i *call* NP_i V*ing*

The verb ***call*** is part of limited class of verbs, including verbs such as ***consider, imagine, let*** and so forth, that take an NP direct object complement which, at the same time, functions in a predicative relation with a following NP, AP, PP, or VP phrase, in a construction now commonly referred to as a small clause.[3] In these cases, the NP is a direct object of the verb while the following phrase stands in a loosely-defined adverbial relationship with the verb. More importantly, there exists a predicative relationship between the small clause NP and XP. Wekker and Haeggeman (1986) diagram this relationship in (6).

(6)



The verb ***call*** takes a complement of the form [NP XP], and the predicative construction NP XP does not take the subject PRO, as indicated in (7).

(7) $[_{CP}\ [_{IP}\ NP_i\ [_{VP}$ ***call*** $[_{XP}\ NP_i\ \ XP]]]]$
<*experiencer*, percept>

The theta roles of this lexical use of ***call*** in the matrix clause involve an **experiencer**, an individual who perceives the event and a **percept** which is experienced or perceived. The theta role of the subject of the small clause is assigned by the predication while filling the role of the object complement which assigns its surface case.

Given the fact that small clauses are of the canonical form [NP XP], we might expect four major types of small clause complements with verbs, nominal small clauses, adjectival small clauses, prepositional small clauses, and verbal small clauses divisible into infinitival, gerundive, and participial clauses based on the morphological characteristics of the head V of the predicate VP. One of the very

noticeable characteristics of verbs taking small clause complements is their apparent subcategorization restrictions (Stowell 1981:259). For example, a verb such as ***imagine*** in (8) is fairly extensive in its range of complements, a verb like ***let*** in (9) is quite restricted, and a verb such as ***call*** in (10) seems to fit somewhere in between.

(8) a. I can't imagine him serious about life. (AP)
b. I can't imagine him a teacher. (NP)
c. I can't imagine him in a suit. (PP)
d. I can't imagine him lying about inhaling. (V_{ing})
e. I can't imagine him dominated by anybody. (V_{en})

(9) a. *I won't let you unhappy. (AP)
b. *I won't let you a complete fool. (NP)
c. I won't let you out of the house. (PP)
d. I won't let you go home. (V)
e. *I won't let you taken advantage of (V_{en})

(10) a. He called her intelligent. (AP)
b. She called him a fool. (NP)
c. ?I called him in trouble. (PP)
d. *I called him lying about inhaling. (V_{ing})
e. ?I called him dominated by anybody. (V_{en})

Given the apparent lexically-based subcategorization which serves as the basis for the restriction of small clauses, we might expect dialectal variation in the range of small clause complements for particular verbs. This seems to be a reasonable basis for explaining the apparent syntactic expansion of ***call*** with V***ing*** in AAVE, just as it is a reasonable basis for explaining other cases of dialect variation with respect to the verb + small clause complements. It is interesting to note that Radford (1988:359), in illustrating the apparent idiosyncratic range of verb + small clause complement constructions, includes several examples of dialectally sensitive complements without apparently noticing this dialect sensitivity. For example, he observes that a noun clause complement with the verb ***imagine*** is ungrammatical in his British English dialect (e.g. **I can't imagine you a policeman*), but this complement is quite acceptable in many American English dialects. Within this paradigm of selective subcategorization for verb + small clause complements, it seems quite reasonable to expect dialect variation in the small clause complements with ***call***, as we have here for AAVE.

The co-indexed subject and object of such sentences are restricted to [+Human], with the understanding that this interpretation extends to some non-human animates assigned experiencer attributes metaphorically, such as domesticated pets. Thus, in sentence (11), we have an example involving a family pet, uttered as the family and dog sat in the room watching T.V.

(11) Look at Spike [a dog], he calls himself watching T.V.

It is hard to imagine a nondomestic animal being addressed in this way, as in (12).

(12) ?Look at that cow, she calls herself watching T.V.

The form does not seem to occur with the neuter pronoun *it*, as in (13).

(13) *Look at the dog, it calls itself watching T.V.

In this regard, the pronoun selection shows the type of restriction that Christian (1991) found for the so-called personal dative. That is, a construction like (14a) is acceptable but not (14b).

(14) a. The dog got him a bone.(from Christian 1991)
*b. The dog got it a bone.

Up to this point, we have been assuming that a distinguishing aspect of the call construction in AAVE is the gerund complement, but this is not quite accurate. Although many Euro American varieties do not typically use the co-indexed NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** construction (but see footnote 3), they do use a subset of V***ing*** complements; however, the surface object NP is quite restricted to constructions of the type indicated in (15). Noticeably absent from these are [+Human] NPs.

(15) a. Look at that, they call that dancing.
b. She calls it dancing.
c. They call the twist dancing.
d. They call the war horrifying.

Examples such as (15) suggest that the co-referentiality and 'personal' aspects of ***call*** with small clause V***ing*** are distinguishing characteristics of the use of ***call*** in AAVE rather than the V***ing*** complements per se, which in turn, suggests that the thematic assignment of small clause NP predication is different in the varieties. Whereas other varieties of English certainly use ***call*** with restricted types of V***ing*** complements, as in (15), and with small clause NP and AP complements, as in sentences (16), structures such as those illustrated by the sentences in (1) are generally rejected as ungrammatical and/or socially unacceptable by speakers of other varieties, especially when given in non-contextualized paradigms. In fact, in a survey of 19 Euro American subjects, over 75% of the respondents judged isolated constructions like (1) as ungrammatical and/or socially unacceptable.

(16) a. She calls herself happy.
b. She calls herself a doctor.

Up to this point, we have only presented examples of ***call Ving*** involving anaphors because we have only directly observed examples of this type. Is the gerund small clause complement limited to anaphors or is this an accidental gap? The question is whether or not sentences such as (17), with pronominals and *r* expressions in the surface object NP slot, are permissible. This is not a trivial question, as it relates to considerations of grammaticality and pragmaticality, and, in turn, to the notion of idiomaticity as it relates to this structure.

(17) ?? a. The men call her dancing.
?? b. The mother call(s) the child walking.

Informal, direct probing of decontextualized sentences such as (17) (e.g. Can you say, 'The men call her dancing'?") met with categorical rejection by respondents who were admitted users of NP_i ***call*** NP_i ***Ving***; however, it is difficult to determine the basis for this restriction. In order to determine if, in fact, this was an accidental gap, I constructed the scenario illustrated in (18) to determine if non-anaphors could occur as the object NP. This forced test attempted to elicit pronominals while maintaining the conventional counterfactual reading of the ***call*** construction with anaphors.[4]

(18) Testing for Non-Anaphoric Reference

a. Suppose a little child was just beginning to walk, and his proud mother wanted to think that he was walking even though he wasn't. Choose just one of the sentences to describe what might be said. Remember, you can only choose one sentence for the description.

1. Look at that, he calls himself walking.
2. Look at that, she calls him walking.

b. Suppose that Melinda, a poor judge of dancing, thinks that the people on the dance floor are actually not dancing very well at all. ...

1. She calls them dancing.
2. They call themselves dancing.

c. Suppose a woman who has a dog would like to think that the dog is listening to her when, in fact, he is not listening at all...

1. Look at that, he calls himself listening.
2. Look at that, she calls him listening.

The scenarios were constructed to provide a context in which a pronominal or *r*-expression may reasonably occur in the surface object-small clause subject slot. For example, in a sentence like (18a), it is the mother who is making the claim about

walking, not the child. To attribute the claim to the child would, in a sense, force a reading different from the one explicitly presented in the scenario, thus suggesting a syntactically restricted item, a kind of idiom. If, on the other hand, respondents are quite willing to select the non-coindexed object, then it suggests that the inventory of examples limited to co-indexing may simply be a non-significant syntactic gap in the data. The elicitation task was completed with a limited set of self-reported group users of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, and a group of Euro American non-users in Washington D.C. and Raleigh, North Carolina. The results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Responses to Pronoun Selection Task of (18)

	AAE Speakers		*EAE Speakers*			
	Refl.	**Non-Refl.**	**Refl.**	**Non-Refl.**	X^2	*p*
a.	19	4	12	11	4.846	.05
b.	16	7	6	17	8.712	.01
c.	18	5	5	18	14.696	.001

The results show that African American users clearly favor a co-indexed referent reading despite the contextualized scenario suggesting otherwise. The results suggest that the co-indexed selection is, in fact, a genuine restriction of this construction. This kind of restriction is a typical characteristic of idiomaticity, as syntactic options are restricted along with semantic-pragmatic specialization. We shall discuss the pragmatic basis for this "deictic misreading" in the next section.

The Euro American speakers' responses differ significantly from their African American counterparts as indicated by the application of X^2 test of significance to the nominal results, but the level of accurate referent identity does not match the level we might expect in the typical reference identity task. In fact, for the first scenario, approximately half of the Euro American subjects chose a co-indexed reading despite the fact that the context suggested that it was the mother, not the child, who claimed that the child could walk. Other things being equal, we would expect more accurate deictic referencing by respondents. There is a sense, then, that the differences between groups, while significant, are more gradient than categorical. We return to this issue after discussing the semantic-pragmatic aspects of this construction.

Semantic-Pragmatic Dimensions of *call*

The NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** construction in its unmarked pragmatic context functions as a weak type of counterfactual. Its generalized reading is that the activity of small clause proposition is perceived as inadequate. In other words, the speaker perceives

that the projected proposition is not authentic, according to the speaker's evaluative standards. Thus, in sentence (19), the speaker intends to convey the fact that the luncheon activity is not considered an authentic lunch in her view. Example (19) was uttered by an African American domestic who had recently helped serve a fancy lunch of "finger foods" at the upper-middle class home of a Euro American woman in Washington, D.C.

(19) They call themselves eating lunch ...no fried chicken, no potato salad, no...

The exchange reported in (20) took place after an African American woman made a comment about a man who was doing an out-of-date dance step. S is the speaker, a mid 30s African American female who is a lifetime resident of Washington, D.C., and WW is the author and participant in the conversation.

(20) S: ... and he called hisself dancing.
WW: What do mean by that?
S: He thinks he can dance, but he can't. I'll have to show him how to dance. When you call yourself doing, you don't know what you're doing.

The discrepancy between apparent and actual presentation of the small clause proposition does not, however, mean that the projected behavior is deliberately feigned; the performer may (or may not) be quite sincere about the validity of the activity. The construction finds its semantic-pragmatic significance in the speaker's evaluation of the activity, not in the performer's intentions. For example, sentence (21) was offered in response to a question "Is X still working?" The discussion concerned a colleague who was rapidly weakening due to cancer.

(21) She calls herself still working.

The comment indicates that the subject was trying to work but unable to do so effectively because of her weakened condition. Similarly, the speaker who, with all good intentions, opened her refrigerator to find no eggs for making a tuna salad, offered the comment in (22).

(22) I call myself gonna make some tuna.

Many of the propositions involve the evaluation of behavior that is sensitive to cultural differences, such as the evaluation of dancing in (19) or consideration of an adequate luncheon as in (20), but this is not a necessary theme of this expression, as indicated in (21) and (22). It may be that the theme of cultural differences found in a number of our examples is a more recent development that gives it a specialized cultural significance as currently used in the African American community, although

the construction has certainly been around for some time, as indicated in the example cited from our mid-sixties fieldwork and comments by respondents.[5]

Although the construction carries a generalized negative reading, the negative may be made explicit directly, as in (23a), or indirectly through a subordinate clause (23b) offering support for the counterfactual reading.

(23) a. He calls himself dancing, but he can't dance.
b. He calls himself dancing, but look at his feet.

The extent to which the generalized implicature is cancelable in the traditional sense of canceling implicatures (Levinson 1983:104) is, at this point, a matter of speculation. There is no empirical evidence for sentences such as (24) and respondents generally consider such utterances infelicitous.

(24) ?a. They called themselves/theyselves dancing, and they really were/was.
?b. She call(s) herself being a businesswoman, and she really is.

In all of the examples we have given thus far, the counterfactual reading of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** is essential to the expression. Before concluding the absolute necessity of this reading, however, it is important to examine a conversational routine in which the negative reading of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** is clearly canceled through a special kind of 'flouting'. In this routine, Speaker A.questions Speaker B with the statement in (25).

(25) What do you call yourself doing?

The addressor plays on the counterfactuality of the construction to carry out an indirect accusatory speech act. In this specialized context, a felicitous denial of the accusation is accomplished by flouting the obvious negative implicature. Thus, a response such as *I call myself minding my own business* is now to be taken as a statement of actual behavior rather than one with the traditional reading that focuses on the discrepancy between pretext and 'authentic' activity. To support my interpretation of this conversational routine, I constructed the structured elicitation task given in (26).

(26) Suppose you were minding your own business eating your lunch. A friend comes in and says to you, "What do you call yourself doing?" What would you say? Try to use, "I call myself..." in your answer.

In responses such as (27), it is quite clear that subjects are responding to the indirect accusation.

(27) Responses to (26)

(a) I call myself eating lunch.

(b) I call myself minding mine.

(c) I call myself minding my ownselfs business and leaving yours alone.

(d) I call myself eating my lunch before you came in and disturbed me.

Interestingly, responses such as these apparently cannot place emphatic stress on ***call***; if emphatic stress occurs, it must be placed on the V***ing*** complement in the representational statement that functions as an indirect denial of the accusation.

The use of this construction as an indirect accusation or reprimand is not necessarily limited to the question form given in (26). In a sentence such as (28), one of the few cases of the ***call*** construction found with a negative, the speaker is accusing the addressee of pretexting rather than engaging in a behavior. This sentence was offered by a student who entered a room where a fellow student appeared to be studying for an exam.

(28) I know you don't call yourself studying.

Sentence (28) also involves one of the few instances in which the construction occurs in an embedded clause. Clearly, the verb in the higher clause is quite limited; it is restricted to a small set of cognitive verbs such as ***know***.

As shown in examples such (27), the form of accusation denial in an adjacency pair may be fairly ritualized and routinized. Furthermore, the adjacency pair routinization may impose peculiar restrictions on its syntactic-pragmatic form. For example, denial routines involving 'bald' negatives seem infelicitous, as in (29).

(29) Speaker A: You call yourself studying?
Speaker B: !I don't call myself studying.

Among the felicitous ways one might respond is a form of ritualistic insult that offers an indirect accusation in response to the initial evaluation, as indicated in some of the felicitous responses offered in (27b,c,d), where the second part of the adjacency pair is a return accusation that plays on the ***call*** construction. Another ritualized felicitous response may be carried out through a hedged negative playing on the ***call*** expression itself, as in the adjacency pair given in (30).

(29) Speaker A: You call yourself studying?
Speaker B: At least I don't call myself being in charge.

Through the hedge, the response establishes an implicature that the original accuser, Speaker A, is guilty of hypocritically exhibiting an illicit behavior herself. Of course, such a response would not be appropriate in a non-negotiable asymmetrical power relationship, such as that between a parent and child. It would, however, be quite appropriate as a challenge to an assumed asymmetrical relationship. Even more likely, however, is its occurrence in an exchange among symmetrical peers who use this accusation routine as a form of ritualistic insult--a type of 'friendly sarcasm'. Certainly, this type of teasing accusation ritual is a one of the current ways in which the term may be used in conversational routines among community peers. The use of ritualistic insults within the African American community is, of course, a theme that has been discussed quite extensively in the sociolinguistic literature on African American communicative style (cf. Labov 1972; Baugh 1982; Smitherman 1977), so that this type of ritual is well-embedded within the cultural framework of communicative routines.

The small clause proposition occurring as the complement of ***call*** is presupposed to be a neutral or positive act, since one would not deliberately pretext a negative behavior. This reading is reinforced by the responses given by African American subjects to two interpretative elicitation tasks (31a,b), one playing on the semantic ambiguity of the adjective ***bad*** (31a) in AAVE and one playing on the conventionally negative adjective, ***foolish*** (31b). The presupposed positive reading of ***foolish*** is supported in the kind of Gricean sense-making reading offered by one of the respondents in (32).

(31) a. Suppose a person said, "He calls himself acting bad." Would <u>bad</u> be considered something positive or negative?

b. Suppose a person said, "He calls himself acting foolish?" Would acting foolish be considered something good or bad?

(32) Something good to act foolish, like sometimes with the kids, trying to keep up with them, acting bad.

As we have seen from our previous discussion, the pragmatic function of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** imposes severe pragmatic constraints on the syntactic distribution of this construction, including restrictions on negatives, embedding, and on higher clause verbs. In fact, it is difficult to discuss its syntactic distribution beyond its obvious canonical complements in any meaningful way without appealing to its semantic-pragmatic function, including both its localized pragmatic context and its broader ethnographically-defined role as a speech event.

NP_i *call* NP_i in Other Varieties of English

As noted at various points, there are a number of overlapping syntactic and pragmatic dimensions to the NP_i *call* NP_i XP construction among the varieties of English. Syntactically, we pointed out that the construction is quite common with NP and AP complements in the small clause, and even with a selectionally restricted set of V*ing* complements (i.e., where V*ing* is a gerund, not a participle).

Furthermore, the semantic-pragmatic function of the structure is hardly unique to AAVE. The negative implicature is certainly shared with a wide range of English varieties. Thus, when the T.V. character Murphy Brown uttered the statement reported in (33) to a colleague in the newsroom, she was clearly implying that her colleague was posturing rather than behaving like a genuine journalist.

(33) ...and you call yourself a journalist (Murphy Brown, Jan. 27, 1992)

Similarly, the conversational exchange in (34), which took place between a Euro American husband and wife is built around the validity of the counterfactual reading of the construction based upon the evidentiary clause. In this exchange, the couple is discussing whether a resident qualifies as a doctor; the wife offers a qualifying clause as evidence for the negative reading, whereas the husband challenges the negative implicature through an entailment.

(34) Wife: She called herself a doctor, but she couldn't even deliver my baby.
Husband: She is a doctor, residents are doctors.

As indicated in (33) and (34), the counterfactual reading seems to be the unmarked semantic-pragmatic reading for NP_i *call* NP_i with NP and AP complements in Euro American varieties, as it is in African American varieties with V*ing*. It is also the unmarked reading with pronominals when the NP is an indefinite, as in (35).

(35) She called him a journalist.

However, in other instances with pronominals, the counterfactual implicature does not seem to be the unmarked reading, as in (36), where the sentence may be uttered in response to the question, "What did she call their child?"

(36) She called her Tanya.

The implicature difference between anaphors and pronominals is relevant to our previous discussion of the Euro American responses to pronoun choice as presented in Table 1, where we summarized the responses to the structural elicitation task

involving referent identity of the object pronoun of ***call***. At that point, we were puzzled by the fact that so many Euro American responses selected co-indexing readings when the scenario suggested a pronominal reference. At the same time, however, the scenario clearly set up a situation in which there was a discrepancy between pretext and authentic activity. Given the discrepancy central to the scenarios and the conventional reading of counterfactuality with co-indexing, it is not surprising that some subjects would choose to favor the counterfactuality reading and thus associate this with co-referentiality, even though it was referentially inaccurate. The counterfactual reading is, of course, stronger for African American respondents, but the strength of this reading is a matter of degree rather than kind.

Evidence of this type clearly links the semantic-pragmatic function NP_i ***call*** NP_i AP/NP in other varieties of English and the African American use of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing***, although the relative strength of the negative implicature may be arguable. For example, the cancelability of the implicature in NP_i ***call*** NP_i NP/AP complements seems clear from sentences such as (37) whereas it is questionable for V***ing*** complements in (38).

(37) a. He called himself a prophet, and he was.
b. She calls herself intelligent, and she is.

(38) ?a. He called himself dancing, and he was.
?b. They call themselves eating lunch, and they are.

Notwithstanding such slight differences, one is more impressed with the similarities between Euro American and African American interpretations of the counterfactual reading for these constructions. For example, responses by Euro Americans to items such as (39) and (40), comparable to African American responses reported in (32) above, illustrate the similarity of the semantic-pragmatic reading for African American and Euro American speakers.

(39) Q: Suppose somebody said, "She calls herself combing her hair." How would her hair look?
S: Not as good as the comber assumes, certainly.

(40) Q: Suppose somebody said, "He calls himself dressing." How would he be dressing?
A: Poorly according to the speaker.

Even the conversational routine involving the specialized case of canceling through flouting (see (26) and (27)) is shared by Euro American speakers; thus 22 of the 23 Euro American subjects responding to this scenario interpreted (26) in a way comparable to the African American respondents. For example, compare the

responses by Euro Americans to the elicitation task presented in (26), illustrated in (41), with the responses of African Americans in (27).

(41) Euro American Responses to (27)
a. I call myself eating.
b. I call myself eating lunch and minding my own business.
c. I call myself enjoying my food.
d. I call myself woofing down this sandwich.

Despite the fact that the NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** structure is rarely used by Euro Americans, one is struck by their ability to interpret its semantic-pragmatic significance. The overall unity of the semantic-pragmatic interpretation of this form by both African American users and Euro American non-users, despite some specialized uses by AAVE, is impressive.

The Status of NP_i *call* NP_i V*ing* as an AAVE Structure

We now return to the issue that was set forth at the outset of our discussion when we surveyed the explanations for neglecting particular structures found in AAVE. I have already noted that this construction is a relatively rare form that has apparently been around for some time, although it may have taken on a specialized role as an evaluative and ritualized speech event in some of the uses we observed in our collection of data on this form in recent years.

I have also pointed out that it is a form commonly used in in-group evaluative routines that typically take place outside of the kinds of the traditional ranges of sociolinguistic interviews conducted by professional strangers or even community members.

Although NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** is certainly a lexically restricted item that shows idiomatic attributes, this should not necessarily warrant exclusion as an illustrative AAVE form. As we mentioned at the outset, there is a curious selectivity with respect to lexical items and idioms. Some are repeatedly cited as characteristic of AAVE and some are ignored. Lexical selectivity and idiomaticity are not sufficient reasons in themselves to warrant the level of obscurity that this form has enjoyed, but added to its relative rarity and situational restriction they certainly seem adequate to explain its anonymity.

The final chapter in the story of obscurity is written by the status of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** as a camouflaged form. As found in descriptive accounts of AAVE, camouflaging refers to forms that, on the surface, appear structurally identical to acrolectal forms while maintaining some unique functions. The two prime examples of camouflaged forms in the descriptive literature of AAVE are so-called 'indignant ***come***' with complement V***ing*** clauses (Spears 1982), and aspectual ***steady*** (Baugh

1984), as exemplified in (42) and (43), where (a) exemplifies the camouflaged form and (b) exemplifies an analogous acrolectal structural form.

(42) a. They come talking that trash about him. (from Spears 1982)
b. They came running when they heard the news.

(43) a. They steady working on the project. (from Baugh 1984)
b. They work steadily.

In both cases, it is proposed that the unique semantic-pragmatic functions of (42a) and (43a) are disguised by the structural similarities, in (42a) to the acrolect motion verb ***come*** in (42b), and in (43a) to the acrolectal adverb ***steadily*** in (43b). In these paradigm cases, syntactic overlapping disguises semantic uniqueness. Other cited cases of "word camouflaging" involve a shared acrolectal lexical item (e.g. 'habitual ***be***' and 'remote ***been***') that may mask a unique aspectual function. The critical component of the classic camouflage examples is semantic-pragmatic uniqueness.

The case of ***call*** discussed here seems to be somewhat different from the classic cases of camouflaged forms while sharing some common traits with these forms. For one, it involves a slight expansion of the XP within a small clause complement, a shift that is very understandable in terms of (1) the canonical paradigm of small clause phrases and (2) the lexically-based selectivity of subcategorization typical of small clause complements.

Furthermore, there is a common semantic-pragmatic reading that unites the reading of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** constructions with the counterfactual reading of NP_i ***call*** NP_i NP/AP attribute constructions in other varieties of English. This semantic-pragmatic commonality, in fact, seems to contribute a great deal to the camouflaging, since it provides a ready semantic reading for an analogical syntactic expansion that might seem obtrusive otherwise. In other words, the common semantic-pragmatic counterfactual reading may be a distractor for the syntactic extension and the specialized culturally-embedded evaluative functions it apparently fills among members of the African American community.

This interpretation of camouflaging was supported by an inadvertent observation that I made while administering two independent tasks to Euro American speakers. In one of the tasks, I simply asked a group of Euro American English speakers to give grammaticality and acceptability judgments for a varied set of isolated sentences which included NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** constructions, among others. As mentioned earlier, respondents' judgments about its status were relatively uniform in rejecting decontextualized NP_i ***call*** NP_i Ving constructions as well-formed sentences. However, when respondents, including some of the same subjects given the first task, were given the structural elicitation task which contextualized various uses of NP_i

call NP_i *Ving* (cf. Appendix), they were quite able to interpret the construction in ways that matched AAVE uses, even though they did not use the syntactic construction themselves.

In the limited descriptions of AAVE camouflaging offered thus far, it is the syntactic similarity that disguises the semantic uniqueness of a form. There seems adequate reason to conclude that semantic-pragmatic similarity may just as easily help disguise reasonable syntactic extensions such as this one, or at least provide an impetus for a kind of syntactic editing that allows these constructions to pass through the acrolect filter without much sociolinguistic fanfare. Thus, camouflaging must be added to the reasonable explanations for the obscurity of this form already cited.

Finally, we should remember that this syntactic expansion is not socially stigmatized and this diagnostic obscurity may also add to its camouflaging. This lack of recognition apparently extends to members of the non-vernacular African American community, since middle class members of the AAE community still may find it a useful expression to describe certain kinds of behavior.[6,7]

The conspiracy to preserve the obscurity of NP_i *call* NP_i *Ving* seems complete. That this construction has resisted description for so long in the face of the microscopic and persistent sociolinguistic attempts to describe AAVE is a testament to the level of sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and linguistic understanding ultimately needed to describe the sociolinguistic patterns and subtleties of dialects as they function within and outside of their community context. One can only wonder how many similar structures lie obscured within the African American speech community, including both the localized vernacular community and the more broadly-based African American ethnic community. The examination of this structure illustrates the variety and depth of sociolinguistic probing ultimately necessary in order to describe a vernacular variety, or, for that matter, any variety. And sociolinguists call themselves having a good descriptive handle on AAVE!

FOOTNOTES

1. I am particularly grateful to Fay Vaughn-Cooke, Calvin Gidney, and Jennifer Detwyler for providing me with some of my examples of NP_i ***call*** NP_i V***ing*** and for administering some of the questionnaires. Without their enthusiastic assistance and community-based perspective, the study would never have been attempted. Furthermore, I would like to dedicate this study to my former colleagues and students at the University of the District of Columbia, who provided for over two decades a most congenial and receptive environment for this 'professional stranger' to practice social dialectology. Thanks to Ron Butters, Ralph W. Fasold, Natalie S. Estes, and Guy Bailey for their insightful comments on a preliminary version of this manuscript.

2. At this point, it is difficult to estimate how extensive this form is outside of Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, although the speaker cited in (5), living in Detroit in 1965, was raised in Mississippi, so that its use historically certainly extends beyond the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore metropolitan areas. Thus far, I have not found Euro American speakers in Washington, D.C. and Southern English speakers in North Carolina who use the form as a part of their native dialect, although Bailey (personal communication) suggests that it is not uncommon in some rural Southern Euro American varieties. The extent of its use awaits more thorough surveys of various African American communities and possibly some Southern Euro American varieties in the South as well.

3. Passivization confirms the object relationship of the initial object relationship of the first postverbal NP vis-a-vis the second NP. For example, *The president called the candidate a liar/The candidate was called a liar by the president*, but not **A liar was called the candidate by the president*. The simultaneous subject function of the NP in the small clause is supported through small clause subordination, as in *The president called her a liar, but she isn't.*

4. I am grateful to Ralph Fasold for suggesting this scenario format as a part of my questionnaire on this construction. It would be fun, but not fair, to blame him for any inadequacies in its design.

5. Although several subjects mentioned this form as one they remember uttered by their grandparents in the South, the examples usually cited as evidence involve the accusation (and often indirect directive to stop an activity), "What you call yourself doing?" This may simply be selective recall, but it may also be an indication that the declarative comment referring to a theme of cultural difference is part of a more recent development within the African American community.

6. Since this construction is represented among African American speakers who are not vernacular in other ways, it is interesting to speculate about a sociolinguistic role

for it as a structure of acrolectal African American English. It may well be that such subtle distinctions are essential to the definition of so-called Standard African American English.

7. There is an interesting and somewhat puzzling selectivity with regard to the sociolinguistic recognition of AAVE features with community members. For example, while ***ain't*** for ***has/vn't*** and present ***be +'nt*** constructions is recognized widely as a sociolinguistic stereotype by narrowly-defined and broadly-defined community members alike, its analogical use with ***didn't*** (e.g. *He ain't go to the show.*) often goes unrecognized. In fact, its existence is often denied vehemently until actual tape recorded examples of this construction are played. Certainly, such examples provide evidence for a type of sociolinguistic editing that needs to be explained on the basis of some general linguistic and socio-psychological principles.

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APPENDIX
Questionnaire on Call

I am interested in understanding how sentences such as They call themselves going to school or She calls herself combing her hair are used and interpreted in some dialects. I would appreciate it if you could answer the following questions about this form.

Have you ever heard anyone use this expression? ___Yes ___No
Would you ever use this expression yourself? ___Yes ___No

Think of three different ways **you** might complete the following sentences.
a. He calls himself...
1.
2.
3.

Suppose a person said, "He calls himself acting bad." Would acting bad be considered something positive or negative?

Suppose a person said, "He calls himself acting foolish." Would acting foolish be considered something good or bad.

Suppose somebody said, "She calls herself combing her hair." How would her hair look?

Suppose somebody said, "He calls himself dressing." How would he be dressing?

Suppose a little child was just beginning to walk, and his proud mother wanted to think that he was walking even though he wasn't. Choose just one of the sentences to describe what might be said. Remember, you can only choose one sentence for the description.
1. Look at that! He calls himself walking.
2. Look at that! She calls him walking.

Suppose that Melinda, who is a very poor judge of dancing, thinks that people on the dance floor are dancing great when they are actually not dancing well at all. Choose just one of the following sentences to describe this situation. Remember, you can only choose one sentence for the description.
1. Melinda calls them dancing.
2. They call themselves dancing.

Suppose a woman who has a dog would like to think that he is listening to her when, in fact, he is not listening at all. Choose one of the following sentences to describe this situation. Remember, you can only choose one sentence.

1. Look at that, he calls himself listening.
2. Look at that, she calls him listening.

Suppose you were minding your own business eating your lunch. A friend comes in and says to you, "What do you call yourself doing?" What would you say to the friend? Use "I call myself ... " in your answer, even if you don't normally use it in your speech.